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ABSTRACT

"Frame alignment"--the conscious process of creating correspondence between one's own "frame" (ways of making meaning out circumstances) and someone else's--is a necessary condition for participation in organized social movements. Frame alignment processes may offer a generative and useful alternative to the reductive stereotyping of Aristotelian-derived "writing for audience" while serving as a type of heuristic for writing arguments in first- and second-year college composition courses. Conventional instruction in locating and deploying types of evidence does little to suggest how assent might be fostered. Frame alignment processes, however, particularly those of value and belief amplification, offer something of a heuristic for constructing audience. As an interpretive framework for reading arguments in process, the methods of frame alignment, through their focus on points of congruence among interpretive frames, may offer the potential to reinforce the empathic "listening" derived from Carl Rogers' experience with clinical therapy. Frame alignment theory recommends a pedagogical and discursive practice that figures frame extension--the effort to engage, critique, and embrace diverse interests or points of view--as a rhetorical principle. (An appendix describes frames and frame alignment principles.) (RS)

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Compromise and Conciliation: Frame Alignment Theory in the Argument Class

A Paper Presented to the 1993 CCCC at San Diego, CA

All gestures here are necessarily equivocal.
--Derrida, Positions

Mr. Coats, Mr. Nelms, and I like to think that the multidisciplinary inclusiveness we're celebrating this afternoon has been most admirably characterized by Janice Lauer as a "willingness to take risks, to go beyond the boundaries of . . . traditional training into foreign domains in search of starting points, theoretical launching pads from which to begin" (21). Yet we're well enough aware that what we're doing has elsewhere been called composition studies' "shopping cart approach to scholarship." Inside the academic supermarket I found the paper products on the very busy sociology aisle. This is what I bought.

In a 1974 book titled Frame Analysis, sociologist Erving Goffman introduced the term frame to signify what he called a "schemata of interpretation"--a way of making meaning out of circumstance. According to Goffman, an individual's interpretive frame organizes experience, guides action, and determines the possibility of assent or disapproval. Goffman's explanation of how an interpretive frame functions suggests that it is constituted and maintained by, perhaps is inseparable from, the language that inscribes it. According to Goffman, an

interpretive framework "render[s] what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful." Each framework, Goffman suggests, "allows its user to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences *defined in its terms*. . . . the type of framework we employ provides a way of describing the event to which it is applied" (21-24).

Goffman's description of frame, then, expressly linking ideology and language, is not inconsistent with Jim Corder's "definition" of rhetoric as "a way of being in the world through language" or James Berlin's "notion of rhetoric as a political act involving a dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social, and the individual writer, with language as the agency of mediation" (488).

In a 1986 article in the American Sociological Review, David A. Snow and his co-authors extend Goffman's concept of the interpretive frame to suggest that frame alignment--the conscious effort to create correspondence between one's own frame and someone else's--is a necessary condition for participation in organized social movements (MADD; Greenpeace). By focusing on how social movements construct linkage, congruence, or complimentarity between their institutional frames and the frames of potential adherents, Snow *et al.* directly address methods of persuasion, including the appeals we generally associate with argumentation. The processes that they maintain motivate shifts in ideology, or frame, are intrinsically rhetorical. A frame

transformation--or conversion--they contend "is rooted in the displacement of one universe of discourse by another and its attendant rules and grammar for putting things together" (475). Frame alignment, they declare, is "an interactional and ongoing accomplishment" (464) realized by an "accounting and recounting," what they call a "dynamic . . . processual" activity (467).

If we accept the claim of Snow et al., that frame alignment is a necessary condition for participation, we are in effect agreeing that participation follows assent. These inherently rhetorical frame alignment processes, then, these efforts to, in Goffman's terms, "utterly change what it is a participant would say was going on" (45), bear examination for possible application in a course devoted to argumentation. I believe these frame alignment processes may offer a generative and useful alternative to the reductive stereotyping of Aristotelian-derived "writing for audience" while serving as a type of heuristic for writing arguments. Moreover, these strategies are consistent with efforts to widen the goals of the argument class--from learning how to support *a priori* opinions to engaging in the *process* of argumentation as a way to clarify ideas, broaden intellectual consciousness, and promote the possibility, perhaps the risk, of "movement and development in assumptions, beliefs, practices, and affiliations" (Jasinski 53). I'll go on to explain.

Concerns about audience and its role in written discourse have been central to composition's professional literature since the reinvigoration of rhetoric in the early 1960s. Simplistic

applications of Aristotelian audience theory, such as assignments that ask students to analyze a static "target audience" in terms of race, age, gender, occupation, sexual preference, religion, or political affiliation assume, according to Russell Long, "that observable physical or occupational characteristics are unvaryingly accurate guides to attitudes and perceptions, and that people sharing certain superficial qualities are alike in all other respects" (223). The stereotyping of "writing for audience" pedagogies, then, has been thoughtfully critiqued from the position that audience is best described as an element of a writer's inventive strategies, that "writing *distances* the reader *ipso facto*, creating an absent space that can only be filled with the writer's presence" (Vandenberg 90). Walter Ong for example, contending that "the writer's audience is always a fiction" (17), suggests that a writer must first "construct in his imagination, clearly or vaguely, an audience cast in some sort of role" (12). As Long explains, "a writer's choice of alternatives determines his audience; that is, his decisions *create* a very specific reader. . . . Rather than beginning with the traditional question, "who is my audience?", we now begin with, "who do I *want* my audience to be? . . . . What attitudes, ideas, actions are to be encouraged?" (93).

My own experience suggests that with first and second year college students the attitudes, ideas, and actions that are to be encouraged much sooner than later dissolve into simple calls for assent to their *a priori* positions. Conventional instruction in

locating and deploying types of evidence does little to suggest *how* assent might be fostered. Frame alignment processes, however, particularly those of value and belief amplification, offer something of a heuristic for constructing audience.

Value amplification, according to Snow *et al.*, refers to the identification, idealization, and elevation of a "mode of conduct or state of existence thought to be worthy of protection and promotion"--family; ethnicity; equality; liberty. Rather than simply declaring that a poverty of values accounts for opposition to her argument, a student writer using frame alignment theory might magnify the significance to her argument of one or more values by asserting why it or they do not enjoy greater attention. Snow *et al.* suggest, for example, that values may be suppressed by repressive authority structures; they may have become cliched or taken for granted; their relevance to a particular issue may be ambiguous or previously undeveloped. Invigorating a latent or undeveloped value or asserting an impediment to value articulation--the process of value amplification--can function as an argumentative ground while helping to clarify for students the integral nature of values and argumentation.

While the terms <u>value</u> and <u>belief</u> are frequently interchanged or lumped together when defining an umbrella term such as "ideology," Snow *et al.* offer a useful distinction that demonstrates their connection. Whereas values refer to "goals" or "end-states" about which agreement could be sought, beliefs

"support or impede action in pursuit of desired values." Assent to a value-oriented argument is frequently contingent on the amplification or transformation of one or more beliefs. Just as frequently, these value/belief conflicts arise out of an ostensibly unified framework that greater examination demonstrates to be conflicted. For example, the same religious doctrine that fosters the value of Charity subverts it by promoting the belief that "the poor will always be with us." A firmly held belief in the low probability of change may provoke a what's-the-point attitude that must first be overturned in order to argue effectively for a position rooted in a particular value.

The belief amplification process presents four other ways that beliefs may sustain resistance to an argument; destabilizing one or more of them may be a necessary precursor to assent. Beliefs about the seriousness of a problem, the locus of cause or blame, the efficacy of individual or collective action, and/or the propriety of standing up all may frustrate the comprehensive assent that legitimates action or participation. It is my contention that by implementing these categories of beliefs and impediments to value articulation as sets of *topoi*, students can explore possible combinations or disjunctions, and perhaps generate complex and engaging arguments centered in other than standard logical appeals to conventional evidence.

Any set of heuristics, of course, is a framing device in its own right. The taxonomy of Snow *et al.* is itself an interpretive framework, and teaching argument through it makes it part of the

frame transformation process that defines the effect of education if not its purpose. We cannot sidestep the normative potential of any pedagogy, but we can make pedagogical choices that reflect more sophisticated or better grounded judgments about how and why we introduce students to argumentation.

If we agree that the core of an individual argument *product* (text) is a claim supported by another claim, then we can agree that assumptions rooted in values and beliefs rather than logic or evidence occupy the center of *arguments in process*. The descriptive potential of frame alignment theory suggests it can mediate the distinction between making an argument and having an argument--product and process. A pedagogy that actively situates the *construction* of an argument product within the *process* of argumentation provides a reliable model, one that makes concrete the value of compromise and conciliation in effective argumentation. Students asked to both read and write "through" frame alignment processes must engage more than the technical aspects of individual argument products. As an interpretive framework for reading arguments in process, the methods of frame alignment, through their focus on points of congruence among interpretive frames, may offer the potential to reinforce the empathic "listening" derived from Carl Rogers' experience with clinical therapy. As a heuristic for inventing ways to treat values and beliefs in an argument product, frame alignment processes necessitate familiarity with the ideological grounding of opposing views.

Frame alignment theory recommends a pedagogical and discursive practice that figures frame extension--the effort to engage, critique, and embrace diverse interests or points of view--as a rhetorical principle. We could do much worse than to consider it. I'm not recommending frame alignment theory as a panacea nor as a replacement for studying the enthymeme, the Toulmin schema, or reading Chapter 15 of Rogers' "On Becoming A Person." There's plenty of room in composition's shopping cart.

HANDOUT

FRAME: A "schemata of interpretation" or a way of making meaning out of circumstance. According to Goffman, an individual's interpretive frame organizes experience, guides action, and determines the possibility of assent or disapproval. Each framework, Goffman suggests, "allows its user to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences *defined in its terms*. . . . the type of framework we employ provides a way of describing the event to which it is applied" (21-24).

FRAME ALIGNMENT: The conscious process of creating correspondence between one's own frame and someone else's. Frame alignment processes motivate shifts in frame (ideology) and are intrinsically rhetorical. A frame transformation (an interpretive conversion) "is rooted in the displacement of one universe of discourse by another and its attendant rules and grammar for putting things together" (Snow *et al.* 475).

FRAME BRIDGING

Refers to the linkage of two "ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames" (Snow *et al. 467). Use of bridging assumes that frame alignment is lacking only because two frames are* situationally isolated.

FRAME AMPLIFICATION

The meaning of new experience is sometimes "shrouded" by uncertainty, ambiguity, and/or indifference. Amplification is the effort to actively clarify and invigorate a latent frame.

BELIEF AMPLIFICATION

Foregrounds and clarifies attitudes and/or accepted dogma that impedes action or assent to value amplification.

VALUE AMPLIFICATION

Refers to the "identification, idealization, and elevation of . . . a mode of conduct or state of existence thought to be worthy of protection and promotion" (Snow *et al.* 469).

FRAME EXTENSION

The conscious extension of an interpretive frame in order to encompass points of view or interests of potential adherents.

FRAME TRANSFORMATION

Refers to the "redefinition" of activities or events that are already meaningful in some primary framework so that they are then *experienced* differently.

DOMAIN-SPECIFIC TRANSFORMATION

"Aspects of life" (consumption patterns, social relationships, social status, self-perception, etc.) once taken for granted are reframed as problematic, unjust, essential, etc., thereby necessitating change.

GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION

The displacement of a primary or "master" interpretive frame with another allowing for complete reorganization of experience.

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